

May, 1990



MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES, INC.

The Lansing Area Chapter of MACLD was formed in 1968. The meeting was in a junior high school auditorium and the auditorium was pretty well filled - I think ^{over 100 people} ~~at least a thousand~~ ^{of Lansing} people. Fran King from Detroit was the keynote speaker.

It was a time of social movement and social change. There was recognition that many children of normal or above average intelligence were doing poorly in school and often in life. Parents of these children wanted ~~the~~ schools to be more flexible and help these children in the regular classroom but in the end the legislature created a new category in the special education Code - learning disabilities.

It was normal for Lansing to



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hotted of activity for special education.
 Marvin Beekman had created a special
 education program in Lansing and later
 was the director of special education
 for the State of Michigan. Parents moved
 to Lansing to take advantage of programs
 especially after Beekman Center opened.
 Lynwood Beekman, son of Marvin,
 became a lawyer and, with a little help,
 wrote a mandatory special education
 law for Michigan. In a few years the
 law became a model for the mandatory
 special education law for the United States.

But the services did not easily follow
 the mandate. A "Learning Disabilities
 Committee" was formed in the Lansing
 School District. Many employees of
 the district who had expertise in

helping children with learning difficulties served on the Committee. Two parents of sons with learning problems also did much work as Committee members. They were Mary Reisch and Florence Curtis.

Progress was made but often tensions rose. In 1974, Lansing District had both full time and part-time programs for learning disabled children but there were illegal waiting lists.

In the summer of 1975, special education director Harry Butler discontinued most of the resource room teaching programs (for children who needed only part-time assistance). a meeting was held to try to reverse this illegal move.

But the meeting was unproductive and ⁽⁴⁾
in September, 1975, a request for an
investigation of the Lansing School District
by the Ingham Intermediate District was
filed. This request was backed up by a
law suit which did remain in the background.
The lawyer in these matters was Raymond
Beckman, who donated his time as a public service.

The complaint and request for investigation
was, I believe, the 6th to be taken before the
State Board of Education under the mandatory
state special education law and was the
most important complaint up to that time.
Because other persons in the investigation
and suit all moved out of Lansing
(The resource teacher who started the
complaint needed a new job!) I became,
as President of the Lansing area Chapter of
MACTD, the chief party working with
Lynna Beckman.

Many Michigan State University professionals in special education were supportive regarding the Complaint and investigation, as were parents. The Case ~~and~~ the Complaint was the first real test of the special education ^{enforcement} procedures in Michigan and many weaknesses were exposed. The Ingham Intermediate School District asked Helen Romsek to conduct the investigation but gave her inadequate time; probably the inadequate time was an attempt to sabotage the investigation. Helen Romsek did a thorough investigation in the short time allotted and found a number of non-compliance areas. Of course, those filing the Complaint and asking for the investigation were pleased.

Superintendent of Public Instruction John W. Porter shared limited information.

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With the State Board of Education and restrictive public input policies of the Board made it impossible for Attorney Beekman to speak at the meeting before the complaint was considered. Later, Barbara Roberts Mason, a new board member, was especially helpful to those bringing the complaint. At a second board meeting, before a large number of school administrators who were visiting the meeting as part of a conference, Ms. Mason made it clear that she believed that she was unhappy with the Department of Education, including Superintendent of Public Instruction John W. Porter and Special Education Director Murray Batten. Public input procedures were changed by the State Board of Education so that Board members would hear testimony before they voted on issues. But the

State Board was very weak about its^⑦
enforcement against the Lansing School
District. The Complaint was closed, the
law suit dropped and Lynn Beckman
and his clients felt they had lost.
However, the Lansing School District
did reinstate part-time programs for
learning disabled and emotionally impaired
Children (There was a serious question
about the qualification of those teachers
that were hired). Parents were involved
in hiring a new special education
director for the Lansing School District.
Perhaps we lost but still made an
important difference in services given.

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